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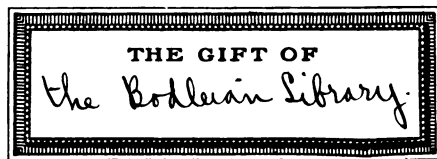
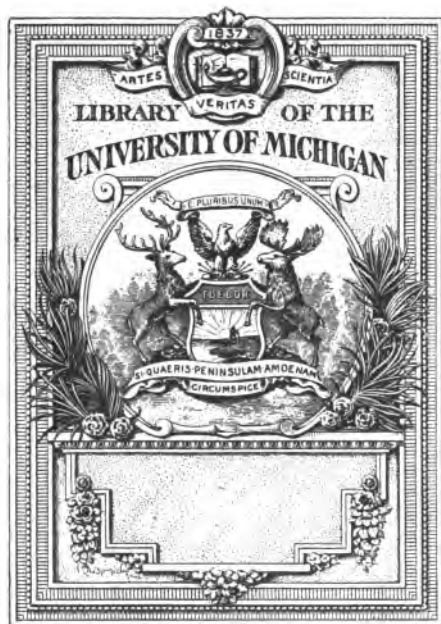
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HOLYROOD

THE NEWDIGATE POEM

MCMVIII

JULIAN S. HUXLEY



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HOLYROOD.

HOLYROOD

THE
NEWDIGATE POEM

1908

BY
JULIAN S^r HUXLEY

SCHOLAR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE

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B. H. BLACKWELL, 50 & 51 BROAD STREET
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MCMVIII.

*“Resolve to be thyself; and know, that he,
who finds himself, loses his misery.”*

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27 May 1891

HOLYROOD.

I.

KING DAVID of the Scots upon his throne
Sat solitary, brooding, chin on hand ;
His spirit on the wings of thought was flown—
Soaring and circling in the blue, it scanned
With eager eyes the fair and spreading land,
The country of the future, far away
Fading in Time's blue haze: ah, there he planned—
What glories and what beauties, who shall say ?
But though Night's dreams are gone, we have the deeds
of Day.

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II.

God-fearing and devout, remembering
That earthly kingdoms all are held in fee
From One, the Greatest and Eternal King,
To His divine and glorious Majesty
A many shrines he vowed, that worthily
Should testify to God throughout the land.
And happier than his namesake monarch he—
Than David of the Jews: for his own hand
Executor might be of all his heart had planned.

III.

So to the glory of God the Abbeys rose
Across the lowlands: gleaming here and there
A soaring spire, or tower majestic shows
To the shepherd watcher on the hills. Ah, fair
They raise their shining turrets o'er the square
Of dark, broad-buttressed dormitory and hall,
Cloister and church: across the smoke-blue air
He sees them, and the town, that nestles all,
Like timid birds, around the mother Abbey's wall.

IV.

Most famous name among them all, there stood
By Edinburgh, dweller on the hill,
The noble Abbey of the Holy Rood.—
As at a river's mouth, the flood-tides fill
The channels and the winding creeks, until
The estuary flats from shore to shore
Are one great lake: so, without haste, and still,
The tides of Life around the Abbey pour,
In far-spread beauty widening, rising, more and more.

V.

But at the appointed hour the waters turn,
Turn, and flow back, and leave the land-locked bay.
One vast plain only can the eye discern
Of muddy sand—a dull expanse of grey,
Save its one silver, twisting waterway:
No ship can sail there now; but down there speed
The whistling flocks of sea-fowl,—here they stay
The time of ebb, among the stranded weed,
Stippling the oozy marge with prints of feet, to feed.

VI.

So back again from Holyrood there flowed
The sparkling sea of life with ebbing tide.
In silence now, no longer the abode
Of kings and princes in empurpled pride,
Nor sole in grandeur, but on every side
Hemmed in with mean and petty streets, it lies,
By gaunt, smoke-belching chimneys overspied ;
And trooping through, the mob with eager eyes
Gapes at the solemn relics of the centuries.

VII.

But he who comes alone, and brings a soul
Attuned to catch the sweet and plaintive song
Of Life, and the far-off majestic roll
Of Universal symphonies,—not long
Shall he be there before he feels a throng
Of forms invisible that brush him by,
And strain to whisper to him ; but their tongue
To us is dumb : we scarce can hear them sigh,
Those clinging memories that live where great deeds die.

VIII.

They haunt the heritage of ages past,
Yet of the common people are not known ;
In inmost secret nooks they hide them fast
Before such noisy comers. But their own,
Their chosen one, will be inspired, and shown
Light filling Time's dark alleys to the brim,
Will see those shadowy forms he had thought blown
By winds of Fate about those vistas dim,
Puppets no more, but men—they too are men, like him !

IX.

And first the hooded monks, along the years
At quiet work throughout the quiet days :
Afield go some, or e'er the sun appears,
On business of the soil ; at home there stays
One band, that labours to show forth God's praise
In books fair-writ, with pigment glowing deep
Gemming the page ; and some, in rapt amaze,
Their visionary meditations keep,
And let the slow sun round their cell unheeded creep.

X.

Yet all a common life to one end living ;
In their simplicity of ordered round
Now and again themselves a breach forgiving
To welcome kingly guests. Then does the sound
Of herald trumpets and the pipes astound
The quiet walls : in sombre rangèd line
The monks on either side the gate are found :
Between, the courtiers, bright, fantastic shine,
And enter : through the place the gay life runs like wine.

XI.

The friendly monks beside the mighty town
Soon found such favour with the Scottish kings,
The royal abbey for their own they crown
With palace royal.—As the comfortings
Of all religion first well up in springs
Open and fresh ; soon, man-enclosed, they flow
In channelled marble ; yet this pomp but brings
A lesser purity and stream more slow :
So does the courtly life the old plain ways o'ergrow.

XII.

Henceforth the abbey has the lower place—
Henceforth the palace rises into fame.
Births, deaths, in turn these four walls' narrow space,
Feasts, councils, murders, coronations frame.
The poet king here from his prison came
Home with an English bride: the Rosebud here
Wedded the Thistle-scion, that the shame
Of sister-lands at war might disappear.
Vain wish, fond hope, we know! For Flodden looms, how
near!

XIII.

Hence, from a troubled and imprisoned youth
The next king to a troubled life did fly:
Clung to the old, yet part the new-found truth
Believed; and, after Solway Moss, to die
Half-glad, he left poor Scotland's crown to lie
Unworn, for years of strife and blood and shame,
Till Mary, his fair wayward child, put by
Her foreign home, and mother's rule, and came
Happy and young—and yet to strike the land aflame.

XIV.

For thronèd kings and queens must stop their ears
To elemental Nature's passion-call,
Or, like this Queen of Scots, in hopeless tears
After a high tempestuous course will fall.
Happy was she at first, and Holyrood Hall
The one spot in the land where mirth could show,
And unrebuked ; but yet, with mirth and all
She had brought passion and, with passion, woe—
Soon here, agasp to see the blood of Rizzio.

XV.

—More woe, when with the crash that killed a king
Woke startled Holyrood at dead of night :
Most, when it saw her, poor, heart-broken thing
With Bothwell's callousness, in lonely plight
On the Loch Leven road pass out of sight.
And with her fades the fame of its past day—
Till, in the fire the Roundheads set alight,
Grim, over-zealous men, it dies away,
With the charred ruins smouldering out in ashes grey.

XVI.

Yet once more glowed the embers into flame,
When gay Prince Charlie, in triumphant state,
Flushed with the heady wine of victory, came.
Winged Youth seemed safe from dark, low-creeping
Fate:

Yet his own boyish revels, carried late
Into the listening nights, his fall ordained,—
Doom was by those delays predestinate.
Too pleasant Holyrood! whose charms restrained
Thy bonny prince, when one swift stroke all might have
gained!

XVII.

The embers kindled, flared, and flickered out . . .
The palace now, part-ruined, empty, grey,
Like an old grey-beard who begins to doubt
If he has not outlived his useful day,
Lies silent—seeming, one might almost say,
Sad and aweary of its useless state.
Yet grieve not, spirits of the place: ye may
Rather rejoice and be assured that Fate
Not yet has made your term of use determinate.

XVIII.

For that is not the only service, whence
The due effects proceeding all may be
Felt and enjoyed by our corporeal sense,
Termed useful by mankind : so may one see
By some road-side a great horse-chestnut tree,
And think, " What use has this ? its bitter fruits
Refused by all ; its wood for carpentry
Poor and swift-rotting ; while its greedy roots
Steal all the moisture from the young wheat's springing
shoots."

XIX.

But when the shuttle of the sunshine weaves,
Thrown through the leafy warp, its pattern gay,
And the white spiry blooms against the leaves
Shine out like lamps ; or when, at close of May,
The fallen flow'rs, like undissolvèd spray
Lie drifted underfoot ; or when the wind
Blows down the early fruit for children's play—
They free the smooth brown treasures from their rind,
And hide them in their heaped store, that none may find :

XX.

Ah, then, who will proclaim it profitless?
There is a use in every beauty seen,
Each innocent-enjoyèd happiness:
More strong we bear the hours of toil and teen
If that our soul, whereon we needs must lean,
By beauty late has been upbrimmed full measure;
More cheerful turn, when delving we have been
Into our childish memories' hidden treasure,
To work, that children yet to come have such pure pleasure.

XXI.

So now, great palace, comfort of the mind,
Not body's shelter is required of thee.
Useful it is to toil—for humankind
Without unceasing toil would cease to be;
But toil needs guidance in adversity,
And comfort—so 'tis useful too to dream
Visions of beauty for mankind—to see
The Present's place in the Eternal scheme,
And point which way to turn Life's undeciding stream:—

